

VZCZCXRO4823
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSI #1979/01 2201315
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 081315Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7243
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001979

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA, EUR/CARC, AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/27/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GG](#) [RU](#)
SUBJECT: DAS BRYZA MEETS WITH OPPOSITION MP'S

REF: A. TBILISI 1638

[B](#). TBILISI 1477

[C](#). TBILISI 1242

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Mark X. Perry for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On July 27, EUR DAS Matt Bryza met with leading opposition Members of Parliament. Their most urgent concern was elections, and they raised the issues of the fairness of the majoritarian system and composition of the Central Election Commission (CEC) (reftel A). Although they also mentioned the need to lower the threshold of votes required to enter parliament (reftel B), they said this was not a top priority. They agreed that if the ruling National Movement (UNM) worked with them on the first two issues they would participate fully in the election. The group differed regarding the impact of an Okruashvili presidential candidacy. However, all agreed that property rights violations are another "huge problem," including confiscations or demolition followed by resale. The group appealed to the USG to intercede with Saakashvili regarding Irakli Batiashvili's case, claiming it was purely political (reftel C). They noted the imprisoned politician is being punished for his political views and "is not a traitor." The group generally agreed with the UNM regarding international policy, NATO membership, the conflict areas, and Georgia's relationship with Russia. End summary.

Election Blues

[1](#)2. (C) On July 27, DAS Bryza and Charge Perry met with leading MPs of four opposition parties: Ivliane Khaindrava (Republican Party), Kakha Kukava (Conservative Party), Zurab Tkemaladze (Industrialists), and David Gamkrelidze (New Rights Party). Gamkrelidze presented first, but the group was in agreement on nearly every issue discussed. They emphasized their utmost concern that the upcoming 2008 Parliamentary and Presidential election be trusted by the voters. So long as the UNM maintains complete control in Parliament, they think this trust cannot exist. Their greatest fear is that the new election code will grant an insurmountable majority to the UNM and render the opposition completely moot. (Note: This is largely the case now as UNM has 135 seats of the 235 seat Parliament. End note.) Thus, the very existence of democracy in Georgia will be jeopardized. All alleged that the Central Election Commission (CEC) is controlled by the majority UNM and that the new, majoritarian electoral system (reftel A) guarantees a disproportionate majority of UNM seats. None of the leaders called for a boycott. However, they agreed that if the UNM worked with them on these two issues they would embrace the election and participate fully. Although

they mentioned the threshold issue (reftel B), and they assume it will be lowered, the group believed that this issue was of lesser importance than the other two. (In a conversation reported septel, majority MP Bokeria said that now that the UNM is open to a lower threshold, the opposition is criticizing the majoritarian system and the composition of the Central Election Commission. Per Bokeria, the UNM is unwilling to change the majoritarian system, saying the system exists to ensure the opposition is represented in Parliament, and that a strong opposition party would be competitive in the current structure, regardless.)

13. (C) The group voiced additional election concerns. First, that the UNM can and will use unlimited government money to finance its campaign and appeal to the public. They worried that because the Parliamentary and Presidential elections will be held on the same date, the popularity of President Saakashvili will likely pull additional votes to the UNM's MP candidates. Bryza noted that such a system is normal for Americans. Additionally, the group said that businesses are afraid to show any political attitudes or support in public for fear of retribution via tax, or property confiscation by the authorities. Finally, while they appreciate the proposed USAID program of debates, these will be of no use "if Misha (Saakashvili) and UNM do not participate."

The Okruashvili Question

14. (C) One area of disagreement was on a possible run for President by former Defense Minister Irakli Okruashvili. Gamkrelidze said that his party does not support such a candidacy, arguing that Okruashvili's radical positions

TBILISI 00001979 002 OF 002

would be bad for Georgia. Khaindrava noted that his Republican Party is exploring such a possibility, countering that Okruashvili could provide more balance in the political system.

Property Rights

15. (C) All four MPs alleged that property rights violations are another "huge problem," including confiscations or demolition followed by resale of private property. They said there is limited or no due process for such confiscations, and that these only happen in areas of valuable real estate. They are especially frequent, they said, in Batumi and Kutaisi. They said the new amnesty law would not completely correct the problem as new properties are being confiscated for different reasons, such as shoddy construction.

Batiashvili

16. (C) The group also made an impassioned appeal en masse to DAS Bryza for the USG to intercede with President Saakashvili on behalf of Irakli Batiashvili, former Minister for State Security under the Shevardnadze regime. Batiashvili was arrested and is imprisoned under charges of treason in connection with aiding the warlord Kvitsiani (reftel C). The MPs argued that this is purely a political case, the trial was unjust, and that Batiashvili "is not a traitor." Bryza assured the MP's he would urge Prosecutor General Adeishvili and other senior Georgian officials to ensure Batiashvili enjoyed his right of due process.

International Policy and Abkhazia

¶7. (C) All parties agreed that they are largely in concurrence with the ruling government on international policy, resolution in the conflict areas, and NATO membership. Bryza discussed UN mediation efforts on Abkhazia, and noted the unwavering support of the U.S. for Georgia's territorial integrity. Bryza noted that Georgia seemed to be on a more promising path to resolve the South Ossetia conflict by offering the region autonomy within a unified Georgia. He suggested that Georgia might seek to resolve South Ossetia first, then secure its NATO-MAP aspiration, then turn to Abkhazia. Bryza also stressed that NATO membership would be contingent upon sustained implementation of democratic and defense reforms, and establishment of a vibrant democracy with a viable opposition.

¶8. (U) DAS Bryza cleared this cable.
PERRY